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# The Doctrine/Un-Docctrine of Covert/Overt Aid

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 20 — In his 1985 State of the Union Message, President Reagan issued a call for "support of freedom fighters" who "are risking their lives on every continent from Afghanistan to Nicaragua to defy Soviet-supported aggression and secure rights which have been ours from birth."

Now the Reagan Administration is pushing to add weight to those words, known to some as the Reagan Doctrine. It wants to resume covert military aid to anti-Communist guerrillas in Nicaragua and Angola and to continue similar programs elsewhere.

To its proponents, the Reagan approach represents an unusual fusion of power politics and morality. To doubters, it is neither practical nor proper.

As a result, on Capitol Hill, in foreign policy journals and even within some quarters of the Administration itself, the doctrine is stirring mounting debate. For example, a House subcommittee today sharply criticized new military aid to Angolan and Nicaraguan rebels.

Administration officials expect the "freedom fighters" and their Soviet-backed adversaries to figure critically in the next summit conference between Mr. Reagan and Mikhail S. Gorbachev, tentatively set for later this year.

"These regional issues will be as important as arms control on the agenda," a high-ranking White House official said.

For all the prominence of the idea, Mr. Reagan and his top aides continue to eschew calling what they are doing a doctrine.

## 'A Simple Proposition'

"We don't like to put labels on what is after all a simple proposition, that we are helping peoples fighting for their freedom and laying the basis for negotiated settlements," said the White House official.

Presidents Truman, Nixon and Carter offered up propositions about providing aid to stop Communism and had no trouble seeing their pronouncements proclaimed as doctrines. But in this case, top Administration officials do not seem to want to be tied down to a specific label and commitment.

Nonetheless, other lower-level Administration officials and a clique of foreign policy experts calling themselves neo-conservatives or neo-internationalists have embraced it and elevated the words and actions to doctrinal status.

The core of the approach amounts to four covert programs:

— \$250 million yearly for the last several years to Afghan guerrillas

battling mainly Soviet forces. These guerrillas are said to be holding their own against increasing Soviet power.

— About \$27 million in humanitarian aid last year to the guerrillas opposing the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua, an amount Mr. Reagan wants increased to \$100 million this year, including \$70 million in military aid. Reports are that the rebels have been losing ground in the last year.

— A request for \$15 million, mostly in military aid, to the guerrilla leader Jonas Savimbi who is fighting an Angolan government backed by Moscow and Cuba. Stalemate continues here.

— \$5 million yearly in economic aid to Cambodian groups trying without much result to drive Vietnamese forces from Cambodia.

These programs are all covert in name only. The Administration appears to want to retain that fig leaf partly for reasons of international etiquette and law and partly to give itself room to maneuver on the amount of commitment.

The White House has been trying to extend the covert aid program since 1981, initially because officials believed that the Soviet Union had military superiority and therefore had to be kept off balance and bled in much the same manner as the United States had been by such Soviet-sponsored wars of national liberation as the Vietnam conflict.

Now, with Administration officials generally believing that Moscow is on the defensive strategically, the rationale has shifted and covert aid is seen as beneficial to negotiations and the selling of American values.

Secretary of State George P. Shultz provided the fullest exposition of the doctrine in a speech last December. "Diplomacy is unlikely to work unless there is effective resistance," he told an audience in London. "Sometimes, help may better be given without open acknowledgment."

This reasoning has been roundly attacked by George F. Kennan, the veteran American diplomat, in a recent article in *Foreign Affairs*; by Professor Robert W. Tucker of Johns Hopkins University, who is often described as a neoconservative, in the new magazine called *The National Interest*, and by an assortment of liberals in *Foreign Policy* magazine and in Congress.

## With Similar Themes

Their arguments vary, but they strike similar themes.

To them, the idea of helping anti-Communist rebels virtually everywhere is too open-ended and will get the United States embroiled in countries where there are no vital American interests.

To most of them, to call these rebels "freedom-fighters" is a travesty.

For example, they see the former National Guardsmen who people the anti-Sandinista guerrillas as no less undemocratic than the Sandinistas and with a lot less popular support in Nicaragua. They feel similarly about Jonas Savimbi as against the Marxist government of Angola. As for the Moslem insurgents in Afghanistan, they are anti-Soviet, to be sure, but they are also known as religious fanatics with no love for anything Americans would call democracy.

To many of the critics, more aid to these rebel forces is not likely to force compromises out of their adversaries at the negotiating table. Rather, as they see it, it could end up spurring further Soviet aid to their allies and getting many more people killed in the process.

And rather than causing Moscow to back off and pursue a form of détente more to the Administration's liking, the critics aver that Moscow is more likely to see this pursuit of "democratic revolutions" as a fundamental challenge to its interests and therefore a barrier to détente.

But to Charles Krauthammer, a columnist for *The New Republic* who is a foremost defender of the doctrine and who is widely credited with its christening, there should be no apologies for its "universalism and moralism." That, he argues, is the way to combat the ideological underpinnings of Soviet foreign policy.

Whatever the rationale, Administration officials make plain, Mr. Reagan intends to push ahead, because he believes it makes Moscow hurt.